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ABSTRACT

All employees are influenced by career management actions at each step of their career. The responsibility for career planning rests with the individual, whereas the responsibility for career development support should be the employer's: career management is a shared decision. Career planning training helps employees to analyze their interests and goals, consider options, and make job-related decisions. Career planning is the individual's counterpart to an employer's human resource planning; work satisfaction, career information and training services, and career guidance are important parts of both. Many issues employees raise concerning their careers are experienced by everyone at some stage of work life: goal setting; career frustration; career change considerations; taking stock; taking control; managing oneself; improving career prospects; getting noticed; seeking promotion; networking; mentor value; career ladders; competition at work; office politics; corporate culture; promotion failure; counseling need; and employers' career assistance. The employers' role in career support training can take many forms: career development support techniques; workshops; life planning support; publications; career information resources; helping subordinates; coping with career plateaus; hiring older workers; affirmative action; and realistic expectations. The key to a successful process is in the depth of management attention to career development education needs. (NLA)

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CAREER MANAGEMENT: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

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CAREER MANAGEMENT: WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY?

Every employee is influenced by career management actions at each step of their career: choice of employer is influenced by recruiting programs; choice of job is influenced by selection practices; performance on the job and opportunities for personal development are influenced by the design of the job and the existence or lack of performance objectives; voluntary redundancy, resignation or early retirement are influenced by the benefits provided, other financial inducements and the changing circumstances of personal needs.

Part One: Shared Responsibility

The responsibility for **career planning** clearly rests with the individual, while the responsibility for **career development support** should be the employer's. The employee has the ultimate control over the critical variables: whether to stay in the organisation; whether to seek or accept new job assignments; and whether to strive for higher performance and personal growth. All an employer can do is provide training and information services that can influence these personal career decisions.

When management fails to fulfil this career support role, individuals fill the gap by making their own assumptions about opportunities, often on inadequate data, as a basis for their career action decisions.

While career planning should remain the individual's responsibility, many lack the information, skills, insights or, sometimes, the initiative to determine their own career plans effectively. Employees need help with their career planning responsibility. Career planning training helps them:

- to analyse their interests, values, goals and capabilities;
- to consider available options;
- to make decisions relating to their current job;

- to establish personal development plans that are likely to bring the results they merit and, in turn, benefit the employer.

Career planning is the individual employee's counterpart to the employer's overall human resource planning process; and the two processes should be coordinated by the personnel or training function if the needs of both are to be satisfied.

Work satisfaction

The quest for satisfaction in worklife is far from new. Yet to arrive at a point where the unique characteristics of a person are comfortably matched with a particular occupation is a complex aspect of the journey through life.

As we change in age, physical abilities, personal circumstances and maturity so do our wants, needs and preferences in terms of what we like doing in our work tasks. Our environment also is far from static. The supply and demand for certain sets of skills and experiences fluctuates. Occupations disappear and new ones emerge as technology influences the manner in which work is carried out. Our economy affects the prosperity or otherwise of different industries and, in turn, the requirements of employers for trained people.

What is known is that people need to develop competencies in managing the direction of their own worklives, to become less reliant on their employer providing the satisfiers without effort on their part to define what is wanted. Most need some assistance with this process and it is likely to be required more than once during their lifetime. The design and maintenance of career support systems and worklife counselling functions in this area of human need.

Career planning and development

There are several assumptions which influence the methods used in career information and training services and the outcomes of such support. In summary they are:

- It is important for people to plan their futures.

- A life plan should retain flexibility. For example, it is likely that students leaving secondary education this year will change careers an average of 4.5 times during their working lifetime. Those currently in their forties are part of a generation making an average of 2.8 distinct changes from one occupation to another.

- Learning the skills of career planning and self-management is an integral part of total personal development.

- Self-knowledge is critical for successful decision making.

- People need to have, and maintain in the face of constant change, an accurate knowledge of career paths suitable for their uniqueness and their changing needs and preferences.

- If people are to derive satisfaction from their work they must have a sense of accomplishment. Among other things this implies that they need to be familiar with goal-setting techniques. Without a clearly defined target there will be no sense of accomplishment when it is reached.

- People need to develop the ability to overcome career-related setbacks; they should not hesitate to seek guidance facilities when they experience job loss, career direction confusion or information deficiencies.

- Everyone perceives some form of constraint to their career progress. These constraints are likely to include one or more of the following: poor health; wrong socio-economic origin; inadequate or inappropriate education; gender stereotyping; wrong age; commitments to non-work circumstances; poor self-concept; and geographical location restrictions. Counselling should be readily available at these times.

- Though the match between occupation and person may be accurate, the employment environment in which the job is carried out may not be so. Most will experience negative job elements, such as feelings of being in a rut, undervalued or overstretched, doors apparently closed to advancement, or uncongenial supervision and/or co-workers.

Guidance at a crossroads

Two divergent approaches to career support have been developing for some time. The one with the longer history may be termed the matching of people with jobs. The procedure here is to determine the aptitude and temperament requirements of particular occupations and match these with the characteristics of the individual.

The development of psychometric testing originates from this approach and provides standardised measures to assist this appraisal process. It assumes that individual differences in ability and personality are systematically related to the variations in work categories. Workers in different occupations will have different psychological attributes and their adjustment to work is maximised when attributes and job demands are matched accurately. In the past decade, however, the use of measures of intelligence and aptitude in careers guidance has declined and a number of studies have challenged the notion that test data can adequately predict occupational success, satisfaction and work performance.

The other career support approach puts much more emphasis on counselling as a skill and less on the 'tell and sell' practices of the other. It also places considerable responsibility on employees' applying self-help strategies and using structured self-analysis aids.

The object is to enable the individual to make their own worklife decisions. The key difference is the view that vocational choice, adjustment and coping is a **lifelong process**. Self-concepts change, preferences alter and the initial career choice is unlikely to be sustained throughout a working lifetime. A person may wish to initiate a change of occupation and/or nature of employment environment; or, through necessity, the person may need to learn and apply career change techniques more than once.

The main emphasis in counselling is on helping people to learn how to make career decisions, establish effective work relationships and, when appropriate, be successful at promotion, transfer and finding a job with an alternative employer. The underlying theme is that career choice and decision making are not concerned with a single life event but with the continual process of personal change and learning.

Part Two: Employees' Role

Many of the issues employees raise concerning their careers are experienced by everyone at some stage in their worklife. Others are unique to an individual's personal circumstances. Here are responses to some of those which occur frequently. They illustrate how an employee can take responsibility for their role in the career management process.

Goal setting

> *I feel anxious and confused because I don't know what I want in my worklife. How can I reduce this anxiety and confusion?*

Deciding what is really important in your life is a good place to start. Your values and beliefs have changed many times since the beginning of your career. You will gain an understanding of where you are now by reviewing the reasons for the choices you have made along the way. Also, you need to separate your concerns into different categories so that they can be dealt with individually.

Sort out your key strengths and accomplishments. In this exercise, it is **your** opinion of them which matters—not what other people think.

> ☛ *People need to decide what they want their future worklife to be like by clarifying the 'musts' and 'wants'. This will help them to keep short- and long-term interests in balance.*

You must match self-assessment with an investigation of what is happening around you. There is a host of alternatives to be found, as long as you put the necessary effort into research. You will find both opportunities and restraints, discover what abilities are required and how the employment system actually works. In the process you are likely to be pleasantly surprised about the extent of resources and people who can, and are happy to, help with information.

The next stage is to plan how to achieve your new goals and to develop a realistic timetable. You must also choose and take

actions that will span the gap between where and what you are now and where and what you want to be. This will need to be written as your personal development plan and goal statement. You will then be in a position to keep score of how you are doing and take corrective action if you get behind schedule. It's important to find a person from whom you can obtain an unbiased review of your written development needs, plans and actions.

> ☛ *Fewer than one person in a hundred produces a written career plan document.*

By completing this self-appraisal you have taken a major step towards managing the controllable things in your life. This in turn reduces anxiety. Discovering what you can do about managing your worklife also improves your ability to make something happen in other areas of your life—because you have learnt how to get in touch with what is important to you.

Allowing time to pass without undertaking what I have proposed will not be an adequate substitute for the obligation you have to yourself to become more content and a better person to know or live with.

Career frustration

I know what I want in my next career move but it appears impossible to obtain it. What can I do about this?

You may need to take a wider view so that the right alternatives to your current situation can be identified and a successful career transition achieved. Gather together in written form all the information about the type of the job you really want and your preferred work environment for that job.

Contact the best source of all—find a person who is doing what you believe you want to do. You may have been attracted more by the image of a job than by what it is really like. At the same time, your research and information gathering may reveal practical ways to get your preferred job.

If the job you wanted cannot be realistically obtained, consider what you saw as the advantages of that job. Write them down. By examining your reasons for wanting a particular job, a set of

characteristics can be isolated. Your task then is to find a job with a different title that duplicates all or most of these features.

Career change considerations

I am experiencing a growing dissatisfaction with my current job. Should I change my career?

This happens to most people. Few have not thought of changing careers at some stage of their working lives. But while many think about it, few have the perseverance to make their dreams become reality. If you intend to make a career change you must make sure that this decision is a wise one—and not simply an escape from the routine and frustration that is common to all jobs.

You need to determine what your reactions to different work situations will be: do you prefer more or less security? more or less responsibility? head office or branch work? city or rural living?—and many other considerations.

When contemplating a career change you must look at past experiences to plan for the future. Analyse the skills you used in past jobs, likes and dislikes. Also, you need a thorough understanding of the realities ahead. Career changers must be prepared to encounter obstacles in their path to a new way of working.

What balances this hard and daunting work is the very special self-enrichment I have seen many career changers achieve. Whether the transition to an alternative occupation is rough or smooth, the journey leaves few unaffected.

Whatever your background, education, resources and so on, working life offers so many interesting options. Don't hesitate to seek advice if you are unable to resolve these choices on your own.

Taking stock

What final checks can I make before I follow the new career path direction I have planned?

Have you carried out a thorough survey of the proposed new direction? You need data about the advantages and disadvantages that are part of every career.

Talk to lots of people who are already in positions within this career path. Verify the personal factors that are considered to be essential and desirable for early success.

Examine your motives for considering the change. If your only reason is to escape from a negative environment this may not be adequate for a successful transition. Are you making the change to please others or, much more important, yourself? Is the choice based on your preferences for the type of work or solely on what you regard as your aptitudes? Career choices based only on aptitudes—i.e. skill ability—often do not bring personal fulfilment.

Is your career transition strategy thoroughly planned? Is your résumé drafted? Has it been examined by a competent person whose opinion you value? If you are satisfied with these checks, make sure that you are seen to smile, not frown. People who appear able to solve problems, rather than have them, are the ones that get transfers or promotions.

Taking control

How can I implement my career plan when I have no control over when vacancies will occur?

But you do have control over updating your manager about your career goals, your requests for developing more skills, your work task preferences and personal development activities. You should also keep the staff of the personnel department aware of these.

With this data others can match your career plan with transfer and promotion opportunities as they occur. If you do not keep others informed you will find that decisions about you will made on other people's assumptions of what you are seeking. These may not be in line with your ideas. Promotion and transfer decisions are usually made behind closed doors when you are not present—and not even aware that they are taking place. Make sure that people who have influence over your career future have your current career goal statement, the schedule for your progress and up-to-date credentials—all preferably in writing.

Managing yourself

> *I always thought that my manager was supposed to tell me what development I needed and the appropriate career path for me. Is this realistic?*

Career management is a shared responsibility between you and your employer. But, just as in any other form of partnership, one member is likely to neglect providing adequate attention to the other's needs.

Job move decisions are usually made in an urgent, reactive fashion by managers, employees and job seekers. You need to take care that you do not fall into this trap. People often hurriedly accept a position which doesn't work out. The reason is that they often lack thorough insight into their career needs and the advantages and disadvantages of alternative strategies. How different job environments are likely to affect performance and inner well-being is rarely examined.

The temptations to make a job move are many. They include: getting more money; acquiring practical experience; wanting to please others; not knowing how to say no without risk of causing offence; seeking security; escaping from a hostile work situation; or having closer contact with someone you admire and from whom you could learn. All of these motives can be a valid basis for a job move decision. But, unless you are doing your personal homework regularly, you may move for the wrong reasons. These are aspects whose importance only you can work out. They should not be left entirely to an employer to decide.

> ☛ *Insufficient investigation of a proposed job move may mean that a person's particular needs may not have a chance to be fulfilled.*

Many stop gathering the information needed for rational assessment of alternative career paths and surrender too readily to a manager's proposal. They avoid evaluating whether the change is in both their interests and the employer's. Career development decisions should involve the blending of changing individual and organisational needs over time. Are you sure of your needs?

Improving career prospects

Is there a way I can improve my position with my current employer?

Unfortunately, selling your potential within your current employment environment isn't an easy task most of the time. Factors other than your achievement of current job tasks can sometimes be more important to those 'in power'. These may include their view of your personality and your relationships with your boss and other colleagues. In some cases, no matter how you have grown personally, your superiors regard you as they did in the early days of your career with them.

The following recommendations should help you:

- Undertake an audit of your personal career strategy and actions.

- Identify a mentor within the organisation. If you are unclear about the value of a mentor and how to find one ask your manager for a recommendation.

- List your achievements in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Include specific instances when you saved your employer money. Record any examples of when you increased sales, exceeded quotas or successfully introduced a new product or procedure improvement. List any systems, policies, programs, changes that you introduced which were successful and solved problems. Cite events or situations in which your involvement was viewed positively by your colleagues and superiors.

- Research the next appropriate position to which you wish to be transferred or promoted. Analyse the skills required to perform the job well.

- Evaluate whether you have improved your ability to negotiate and assert yourself. If you haven't, identify and attend a training course to improve your skills in these areas.

- Don't neglect to have a current résumé prepared. Too many people think that résumés are only for job seeking with an alternative employer. A concise summary of your career objective, together with the reasons why you merit it and précis of your employment record, makes a most useful

document to table at your next performance review or discussion about your future with the person 'in power'. Remember that interest must first be aroused in what you can offer before interest will be shown in what you want. An up-to-date résumé can help with this.

These are some of the important actions for career survival, as well as for career advancement. They will take both courage and time to implement. But your efforts will be worthwhile if you really don't want to leave your employer.

Getting noticed

How can I go about getting noticed so that I am promoted or transferred to a better job?

You have raised one of the most important aspects of worklife survival. The manner in which you go about getting noticed can either win you your goal or have exactly the opposite result.

Getting ahead will not happen in a vacuum. A carefully devised plan of personal publicity needs to be followed. Here are some suggestions:

Gain the attention of influential people: Look for opportunities to be appointed to project teams or task forces. Contribute articles to your employer's newsletter or other forms of employee communications. Merit alone will not advance your career but how others perceive you will. Display cheerfulness, energy and courtesy at all times, even when you do not feel like it.

Know yourself better: Take a good look at yourself. Your personal appearance may need attention. 'Dress successful, be successful' is a saying that sums this up well. Read all you can about the management of your career, how to appraise your skills and competencies and how organisations function. Expenditure on quality books on these subjects will not be wasted.

Campaign discreetly: Do not announce your personal publicity campaign to your colleagues. Any finesse or diplomacy will be shattered if you do.

Do more than your share: Take on the project or assignment others are not keen to do. Be prepared to take risks—you may make mistakes while completing it. Offer to take on some of the

outstanding matters in your boss's in-tray or at least do something that will help your boss to conclude the tasks in hand.

Be seen: Attend all functions such as farewells, award presentations, meetings, company picnics, etc. Become active in the professional association linked to your current occupation. Attend all meetings. Write articles for their newsletter. Get photographed at their functions.

Know your colleagues better: While I am advocating a personal publicity campaign, you should not neglect those with whom you work. Essentially worklife is teamwork. Getting ahead requires that others respect you and that they cooperate with you when tasks have to be achieved. Your success requires the involvement of others.

Seeking promotion

> *I have been asked to present my case for being considered for promotion. What should I say?*

It is better to present your case in written form rather than verbally. This will enable you to draft and rewrite your case until you are satisfied that all worthwhile points have been included. You may have time to ask a person whose opinion you value to review it before the final draft is made.

When making speeches about ourselves and matters which are important to us, we frequently become nervous, forget to include important facts and conclude them prematurely. Do not fall into this trap.

A concise summary of your credentials should be assembled in résumé format. List in your résumé the key problems you have solved, or significantly helped to solve, in the past 18 months. Summarise the skills you have acquired to date in your career, as well as your educational qualifications and positions held.

The most important item you should consider, however, is whether you want to take on more responsible tasks and the heightened risk that they involve. If you reaffirm your desire to be promoted, then present your case for advancement by stating the benefits it would bring to the organisation, and not just you.

How to use networking

What is networking? Can it be useful in my career?

Networking is a procedure for establishing contacts and obtaining useful information from people. It helps you solve career-related problems by sharing experiences. As problems will recur and need solving, networking is a process, not an end in itself.

To start networking you must define what you need to know. Then an appropriate network of people can be identified and contacted. Networks can provide you with the support and advice of others. Mentors, sponsors, role models and coaches can be identified and recruited as your resource aids. These are terms given to people within networks who provide different types of help at various stages in your career.

Networking functions because of a very basic characteristic of human behaviour: people enjoy giving advice when they do not feel threatened by the questioner.

Information you obtain from the personal experiences of others is usually more useful than most of what you can find in printed material. It is the people who are doing, or have done, what you hope to accomplish who can tell you what it is really like, what obstacles need to be overcome and how to refine your strategy for achievement.

There are few who have not experienced the loneliness and fluctuating despondency of resolving career-related problems. You will be surprised how helpful and supportive others can be—even people who you don't know well. A few hours a month networking can assure you that you are not alone and can rekindle enthusiasm in your career by revealing new options.

Mentor value

What value could result from finding a mentor or role model?

A mentor or role model will help you negotiate your way successfully through your worklife. Competency, loyalty and long hours of work will not be enough to advance your career. Coping with organisational life and ensuring positive outcomes in your dealings with colleagues requires detailed study and

advice from reliable sources. This is where you need to turn to someone else for help.

> ☛ *Looking after your career is about planning ahead, gathering data before making decisions and revising your plans as new information and circumstances arise.*

Role models are usually people of the same sex who have already taken the direction in which you plan your career. Mentors are people other than your boss to whom you can turn for uninhibited advice and who do not have organisational power to advance, or suppress, your career ambitions. The person you seek as a mentor, coach or role model should be from five to ten years older, be capable of encouraging your trust and should endorse your overall goal. Such a person should talk about you more than about their own problems. Both of you must share your opinions openly with one another and keep each other informed about developments towards possible solutions and outcomes.

A mentor provides objectivity and suggestions. This will help you gain a different perspective of your planned behaviour and actions. The comments of a mentor can help you to formulate your overall career goals and decide what really matters for your inner well-being. It may be strategically unwise to share this sort of personal data with your boss, whose point of view may not be impartial.

Career ladders

What are career ladders and bridging positions? Would they be useful to me?

A career ladder is a sequence of positions planned to be obtained over a period of time, either by transfer or promotion, in order to reach a particular career target. Each position should provide additional skills and knowledge which will enhance the ability to carry out the next position.

Career ladders do not necessarily reflect the current hierarchy of positions on your employer's organisation chart. You need to question others to find out what steps in experience and skills-building are actually required to achieve your goal. You can

rarely make an accurate assessment of these requirements just by reading the published descriptions for the jobs to which you aspire.

All organisations have complex rules and expectations which are usually not clearly spelt out. You must discover these rules and consider them in the development of your career ladder. In this way, each step you plan in your career actually does contribute to your ultimate success.

> ☛ *Your career ladder should be thoroughly reviewed every 18 months to check that the data on which it is based remains valid.*

The career ladder you have developed can be useful for performance and career review discussions with your manager and staff within the human resource department. It will also help you to monitor your progress and feel that your efforts each day, month and year are part of well-prepared plans.

The term 'bridging position' usually refers to a job that can help you acquire additional work experience in an area with which you are unfamiliar. A person in accounting, for example, may move to marketing, without leaving the organisation. Few employers actually provide bridging positions. If you wish to obtain or create one you will need to present a good case which sets out the benefits to the employer, as well as to yourself.

Competition at work

The personal rivalry among my colleagues bothers me. How can I cope better with this?

Becoming discomforted by the degree of competitiveness at work is a feature of worklife which bothers many people. This can be very worrying when it reduces an employee's capacity to work effectively towards keeping the business competitive and profitable.

Sadly, society and our employers condition us to believe that career success can be measured only in terms of increased responsibility and higher pay and status. The message appears to be that only these can produce work satisfaction. This factor is compelling your colleagues to compete aggressively among

themselves. It does not necessarily imply that you should have the same attitude and follow suit.

> ☛ *A growing number of people are interested in the quality of their living. They are seeking ways to make their work, careers, leisure interests and personal development contribute equally to this.*

The market competition between firms has spilled over to produce an overstimulated competitiveness **within** them. If this internal competitiveness were out in the open everyone could deal with it better; unfortunately most is covert.

You must find your answer to this critical dilemma in order to cope better. You will need to make a resolution about the way you conduct yourself at work. Some put off this self-assessment until a crisis in their personal life, or worklife, prompts a review.

You need to accept that you are alone in your job in order to cope. However, you need the goodwill and cooperation of your colleagues to get your job done well. This requires that you spend time in communicating with them intelligently. You need to show them why it is in their own self-interest to help you when required.

Work is a series of alliances with colleagues which continually form, break up and re-form. To ignore this is not just being unambitious, but foolish. Continuous friendly teamwork and harmonious relationships are an unrealistic expectation in worklife—an expectation that fails to acknowledge that people are essentially self-seeking in their behaviour.

Office politics

> *The political behaviour of people where I work is depressing me and I am wondering if all employment environments have to be like this?*

Whenever people gather together politics are created, whether within families, social clubs, sport or work. This situation should neither be condemned nor praised—it is just a fact. Unfortunately many people are either insensitive to the political behaviour of fellow employees or seek ways in which they can

avoid participating. This is often to the detriment of their careers.

Politics at work is about power and interpersonal relationships. Power is about being able to influence: the behaviour of others; changes to work practices; and how money is spent. It is also about forming coalitions or alliances with other people in order to advance one's personal position. These coalitions rarely remain stable. They break down and re-form with different members. Loyalties to one another may change with bewildering frequency.

The social forces that are involved when people communicate are the kernel of worklife politics. The alert, career-conscious person acknowledges this and sets out to study the nature of interpersonal relationships. This can be done by reading books on interpersonal behaviour or attending classes at adult education facilities.

You are more able to adjust your behaviour and attitude by acquiring an understanding of why people behave the way they do. This is important so that you have an ability to influence events rather than be the victim of them. If you do not give some attention to increasing your skills in interpersonal relations you will have difficulty maintaining and improving your worklife situation. Do consider enrolling in a WEA course in behavioural psychology or check your local tertiary education institutions for short courses which may help you understand more about this area.

Corporate culture

> *What is meant by an organisation's culture? Is it important for my career to know what it is?*

Every organisation has a corporate culture, though understanding it can be hard work and time-consuming. It is, however, very important to try to do so. Corporate culture is a pattern of expectations and values held by the senior personnel in authority. It determines the styles of behaviour that are expected from subordinates and colleagues. It extends through to the attitude displayed towards the firm's clients and customers and affects the approach adopted to resolve difficult issues in these areas.

Corporate culture is discovered by intelligent observation of how decisions about people and business are made and implemented, and by listening to what is said, especially by senior people in the organisation.

The nature of an organisation's culture is established by the top person and the executive managers to whom this person answers. It is reflected by the next line of senior managers, most of whom have probably known each other for some time. The culture may take various forms, ranging from a distinctly authoritarian approach to one which genuinely encourages ideas, recommendations, etc. from all levels of employees.

Organisational culture is usually static and, once identified, can be a useful guide to how you should act and communicate. But, in the event of takeover, merger or organisational restructuring, it will change. This can be an unsettling period for employees. In these situations, employees need to cope with the uncertainty and stress created by a new operating environment.

Promotion failure

> *I have recently missed out on an expected promotion which was awarded to a colleague. The fact that I was passed over bothers me but my next action is unclear?*

You have used a very appropriate word, 'action', as lack of it on your part is likely to escalate your anxiety and affect your work performance. What you must do is get the facts, not rely on personal conjecture. Then it may be easier to understand the decision and retain your motivation. You should also acquire data to increase your marketability and readiness for any alternative opportunity.

You have an urgent need to know what happened, so approach a person who you believe will not distort the truth. Explain that you need to know what being passed over implies for your career future. Is it simply that, on this occasion, you were the second best candidate? Or is the reason for the choice going against you likely to remain an obstacle? If so, what should be done about it?

The answer will inevitably be from one of two areas. Either your perceived experience and/or formal qualifications do not meet the minimum requirements of the higher position or there are aspects of your interpersonal skills which are spoiling your

chances. The bright news is that the reason, or reasons, in either of these areas can be rectified, as long as you are prepared to correct any deficiencies.

The critical issue, however, is to establish whether you really want to be promoted and that you are not falling into the common, but mistaken, belief that upwards is the only way to go.

Counselling need

When should I seek counselling about work issues that are bothering me?

You clearly need counselling when you are not coping well with a problem and the discomforting stress that is usually associated with this.

> ☛ *Anything which blocks you from successful living and affects your performance at work is a matter where the support and advice of another is needed.*

There are good reasons to deal with problems earlier rather than later. However, many are reluctant to admit that they are coping poorly. The myth that we can solve all our problems helps to create a denial process within us. If we do not resolve our difficulties this could be reflected in our job performance and relationships with colleagues whose cooperation is essential.

We do tend to find ways to 'self-destruct'. There are reasons for this behaviour but we are sometimes not aware of them. So we need to be sensitive to signs, both verbal and non-verbal, from our associates that they can see something is bothering us. It is important to recognise that we have a need for counselling when this occurs.

An effective counsellor will help you to set goals and draw up realistic schedules for their accomplishment. In the process of achieving these goals, the problem will be resolved. Where to seek such help depends on the nature of the issues. Try to get a recommendation from a person who has experienced a counsellor's service and conquered similar problems.

Employers' career help

My employer frequently states in training courses, newsletters and performance appraisal discussions that they will look after my career providing I work hard. Why should I develop personal career plans?

The same employer probably provides an excellent superannuation fund for when you reach retirement age. But, in reality, no guarantee of security of employment exists for you beyond your next pay day!

Developing your personal career plan reduces the likelihood of unemployment or missing out on a chance to advance your career. In one respect it is like paying for insurance. You don't want adverse events to happen but if they do, you have an action plan prepared to recover quickly from them.

Such planning can assist you in many ways. It can help you cope better with the widening gap between your job requirements and the education and skills you have to apply to them. No set of job tasks remain the same for very long. Any shifts in technology and economic conditions that affect your job or your employer will cause you some confusion unless you have plans in reserve. Unless you develop skills to manage your own career you will not be ready to adjust to change. Nor will you be able to respond to the pressures of your employment environment in ways that are in your best interests.

Thorough career planning is no guarantee that you will weather future threats to your career. However it does increase your readiness to go where you want to go.

The benefits of career planning can be measured by your pay and status level. But of more lasting value will be your feelings of satisfaction, achievement, personal growth and increased self-tolerance—in other words, being more in charge of your destiny and less dependent on the opinions and actions of others. Career planning is worth undertaking unless by nature you have a preference for high-risk gambling. Once your career plans are formulated you will need to review and audit them regularly to reflect changing job conditions, career opportunities or dangers.

Part Three: Employers' Role

Employers who are initiating career support training and counselling facilities need to place emphasis in the content on worklife planning, self-analysis methodology and career targeting, rather than simply on training in promotion and job-seeking techniques. The primary benefit from this emphasis is the change from an expectation among employees who participate that the employer will provide all their career development to a position where the individual accepts specific responsibilities to initiate desired change. The employers' role can take many forms. Some are briefly described in the following pages.

Career development support techniques

The techniques to assist employees include counselling, workshops, self-development materials and assessment programs. Counselling may be provided by managers, or by counsellors engaged from sources outside the organisation. Self-help materials include workbooks and reading materials, whether designed specifically for the firm or published for general use. Such career planning workbooks provide self-directed exercises on self-analysis, career planning and career goal setting.

Workshops

A well-structured workshop increases career awareness and encourages participants of all ages to:

- assess their interests, abilities and circumstances;
- set personal development goals and plans;
- consider their options;
- make decisions relating to their current job;
- establish personal development plans that are likely to bring the results they deserve through their efforts.

The group setting usually fosters constructive interaction and mutual help among employees.

There should be a minimum of three outputs from those participating in a career management training workshop:

1. Conclusions about the person's own capabilities, interests, aspirations and objectives = **LIFE PLANNING**

2. Targets for future job assignments and developmental activities to make that progress happen = **DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

3. Recorded goals and plans, task priorities and reward expectations from current job = **PERFORMANCE PLANNING**

Individuals need to consider each of these so that their day-to-day work activities fit into an overall career plan which, in turn, is consistent with personal feelings and realistic expectations about worklife. Each person needs to link together short- and long-term thinking about careers if personal growth and worklife well-being are to be achieved.

> ☛ *When developing **life plans** the employee draws primarily from structured introspection. When preparing **career development plans** and **job performance plans**, the individual needs to rely on help from their manager.*

Life planning support

Many employees lack the skills to do **life planning**. Few do life planning except in times of personal crisis. When a person loses a job, retires, becomes ill, is divorced or loses a loved one, life planning issues become crucial and urgent. Individuals are propelled into self-evaluation, but few have a firm enough base of self-understanding or emotional composure to manage the stress and mental confusion on their own. Also they do not always have adequate assistance from their managers to do effective **development** or **performance planning**. By receiving counselling support individuals are able to reach considered conclusions about their work and development needs.

Publications

An increasing number of books to aid individuals in their personal career management is being published locally and others imported. Their theme is to assist readers to learn from their worklife experiences and guide them in how to use their new learning from such insights in the development of career plans and strategies. The methods described in these publications assist readers to develop three critical skills—observation, analysis and scheduling. They demand action by readers by requiring a structured analysis of experiences, usually in written form, over a period of time in a comprehensive and systematic way.

Much literature available from government sources and, indeed, from local publishers in the private sector is directed at the needs of the teenager. This ignores the multitude of people of mature age who could benefit from workbooks, interest inventories, career change guidance, retraining data, etc. More tuition materials and diagnostic aids are urgently needed to develop competencies in managing our own careers as adults.

Career information resources

A good strategy is to build career support information gradually, starting with simple charts that show job titles in each function by organisational level. Salary level or grade need not be used, because the purpose initially is to identify only the possible job opportunities. To back up such a chart, publish brief descriptions of the content of and qualifications for each job. Later, refinements may be made. For example, job titles can be grouped into **'families'** of **similar jobs** and possible job progression lines (career paths) can be drawn.

> ☛ *The most common void in the resources needed to support employees' career planning is realistic information on career opportunities.*

Effective career planning by employees does need information about job requirements and career paths, remuneration opportunities and available personal development resources. It is also important that employees learn about the organisation's

business—what it is doing and why, its plans and objectives—and future career opportunities.

A **career information resource centre** can be established providing:

- audio-cassette programs;
- reading materials;
- information on career paths and skill requirements for individual positions;
- self-assessment aids to identify skills, abilities and aptitudes.

Helping subordinates

Subordinates' career problems can be either raised by the subordinates themselves or identified by their manager as needing to be resolved. In both situations it is wise for the manager to plan a structured approach to the discussion. The intent of the interview is to demonstrate willingness to help and bring about outcomes that will benefit both the individual and the employer.

To achieve this it is useful to conduct the interview in four parts. Firstly the manager needs to secure rapport and empathy with the subordinate so that relevant data can be shared in an uninhibited manner. A situation where the discussion will be interrupted or observed by other people should be avoided.

The next part is to lead the discussion into an exploration phase. This should cover the dimensions of the issue and the implications for the individual's career. Here listening and questioning skills will be in demand.

The third part is to understand what is being learnt and to interpret accurately what really is being said and implied.

This kind of helping interview concludes with the manager and subordinate designing an action plan together, using a team problem-solving approach. Essentially, the manager needs to secure commitment to the plan and agreement as to what next needs to be accomplished. This may require breaking down the plan into reasonable steps and scheduling times for their

completion. It is also important to agree upon a timetable for review of the plan.

The career plateau

Reaching a career plateau can cause debilitating stress among employees. This is more frequent for those whose self-esteem is dependent on their work activity and/or who have experienced rapid promotions. They can feel that life as a whole, and not just their career, has lost its stimulation.

A sad feature of career plateau is that employers rarely take any action to help. Their attention is usually focused on those who appear to be worthy of promotion rather than on staff whose careers have plateaued.

There are two types of career plateau. The first, where a person is unlikely to be promoted, is termed 'structural plateau'. While the job content may change there will be only small increases in status, pay and responsibility. The other type is termed a 'content plateau'. This means that the work content of a job is unlikely to change to any significant degree. Not only is there little likelihood of promotion; there is little possibility that the tasks of the current job will alter.

Some people have invested a lot of psychological energy to achieve work success. When a plateau occurs the employer should counsel them with sensitivity in order to restore vigour and interest in completing current tasks well. Information and feedback should be given to help reduce negative feelings and career uncertainty. Staff whose careers have plateaued need to be helped to redefine their ambitions.

This often painful subject must be taken out of the closet so that good people are not lost to the employer. Ways should be identified which make best use of the experience and expertise of those who are unlikely to obtain further promotion in the organisational hierarchy. Efforts should be made to determine what job task alternatives exist or can be created.

There are various methods employers can use:

- lateral transfers;
- short-term assignments to projects;

- altering jobs so that the tasks involve a combination of old and new responsibilities;

- inviting career-plateaued staff to become mentors to younger staff and new recruits.

These techniques are excellent for revitalising attitudes and work performance when a career has plateaued.

Older but not obsolete

Where career support programs exist, they usually focus on the needs of individuals who are getting established: the 'up and coming', young, high potential employees. While this attention is worthwhile, additional actions are required to attend to the needs of those middle aged or older. If they are not given help in coping with their career planning needs, many good performers may be lost. Some may leave, others may simply 'retire on the job' as a result of career frustrations at this stage of their lives. While the 'cream may rise to the top', many employees with considerable talent may be overlooked or left behind, or leave through neglect ('voting with their feet') unless a comprehensive program is undertaken and monitored.

Affirmative action

Equal employment opportunity, personal privacy and anti-discrimination guidelines are creating new demands for objectivity from management. Career management procedures can support such programs.

Equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation at first focused on the recruitment process but now encompasses the internal career progression process of all employees.

Realistic expectations

The key to effective career support services is in developing more realistic—not raised—expectations. Organisations that have been successful in their career development support efforts have guided employees toward **opportunities** that are **actually available**.

They have tried to dispel the 'up or out' view of a career and instead promote other options such as lateral career moves and careers within specialised job areas or locations. An employee need not feel it necessary to be promoted to get ahead. And employees need not change jobs or employers to have career progress. If career planning focuses on personal development in the current job rather than on promotability, potential and career mobility, it can help create more realistic career expectations and help minimise dissatisfaction.

Why try?

Why be involved with career development support initiatives? My contention is that such efforts can be justified on a pragmatic business analysis basis. It is not just another fashionable personnel procedure.

Promotion from within is less costly than external recruitment. To be able to promote from within, human resource management has a responsibility to get to know, work with and develop staff better so that they can assess whether there are more appropriate task responsibilities for them and, at the same time, ensure that staff succession needs are met.

Those organisations that assist their employees through offering participation in these forms of career support regard their efforts as beneficial to both the staff and the organisation because they:

- help employees conduct their own career planning by raising questions that need to be answered and providing information on available opportunities and resources;

- guide employees to take considered advantage of organisational services available for career development, such as job transfers or job rotations, performance reviews, training and educational assistance programs;

- increase employee confidence in the organisation's career management services.

Helping people to manage careers in contrast to just staffing jobs is becoming more important. Changing employee attitudes, equal employment opportunity legislation and pressures to improve productivity are requiring new measures affecting careers.

> ☛ *Our career futures are going to be characterised more by lateral and horizontal career changes than by the vertical.*

Up is not the only way to go, as many are electing to pursue other quests in order to improve the quality of their living. Others are being forced by personal circumstances to choose alternative directions. To reduce the hazards of such moves, a substantial effort is required. Career guidance is needed for adults as well as in an extended form for teenagers. People skilled in understanding and interpreting the interaction over the period of a person's worklife between aspiration, individual preferences, self-discovery, education, influence of others, opportunity taken or foregone and the host of experiences which make up working lives are required urgently to service this need.

The strongest argument in favour of career support services is the inherent nature of people. I have never met a person who would not like to become more worthwhile. The issue in career management is not only the motivation of employees, but the identification and selection of appropriate techniques and procedures to help them. By helping employees with their career, employers, in turn, help themselves.

Reported results

Organisations which have implemented comprehensive career support programs and facilitated the conduct of career management workshops, life planning training and counselling services cite a variety of results. These include:

- improved matching of jobs with people;
- higher quality of data for staff planning and staff succession reviews;
- better focus in the allocation of funds for training needs;
- cost justifications through the transfer of unhappy and unproductive employees to positions which suit them better;

- realistic career growth plans tabled by employees at performance review discussions;

- reduced need to recruit externally as greater capabilities of employees are revealed through their career planning activities and qualified statements of what they seek and why they merit it;

- improved image of personnel and training functions as employees experience assistance which helps both them and their employer;

- restoration of confidence in the regular performance review system as the subordinate and manager focus on more relevant data as a team rather than a confrontation process;

- development of career transition (outplacement) services for those who decide that a career change outside their employer is in their best interests.

The key to a successful process is depth of management attention to career development education needs. This must be intensive and recurring and encourage the self-directed process of self-examination and planning by each employee. It must lead to development of realistic personal goals and action plans by employees that in turn benefit the employer.

To ignore the need to assist staff with their role in career management is to ignore the revolution in attitudes towards working life in the last decade. Moreover, the rate of information and technological change must be matched by efforts to assist employees prepare for multiple careers and avoid the corporate costs of individual obsolescence.

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After twenty-one years' employment experience as a Personnel Manager dealing with the problems of employer/employee relationships in the UK, Canada and Australia, Paul Stevens created The Centre for Worklife Counselling in 1980. His concern for individuals and their search for satisfaction in their work motivates his daily counselling and teaching activities, as well as his writing.

Paul has become nationally known as a counsellor, broadcaster and author of nineteen publications on worklife and career management issues.

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